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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, December 20, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "What Tags Tell." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, USDA.

--ooOoo--

You may be surprised when I tell you that the news I have for you today is about tags -- not price tags nor automobile tags nor tag-day tags nor any of the more familiar kinds. No, my news is about a new type of tag that should be of special interest to us women -- the tags that are appearing on many ready-made clothes.

My own interest in the subject began one day when I happened to be visiting the Bureau of Home Economics and heard that the clothing specialists were making a collection of clothing labels. Well, I had heard about stamp collecting as a hobby, but label collecting was a new one. In fact, the idea struck me as so odd that I went around to the clothing laboratory just to learn what it was all about. True enough, there on Miss Scott's table I saw enough tags spread out to make me dizzy. Each one had come on some article of clothing and each was of a different size, shape, color and -- message. The message happened to be what mattered to the specialists. You see, they were making this collection not for the fun of it, but to aid us women shoppers -- to find out just how many tags on clothes are helpful to those who do the buying for the family.

You know, for many years now home economists have been urging manufacturers to put what they call "informative labeling" on merchandize, so those of us who are out buying can make our selection on definite facts and prevent disappointment. Well, recently the goal seems a little nearer, judging by the number of labels that are appearing on all kinds of goods. But the trouble is that very few of these tags really tell us anything that helps. Just a few give definite information, but others are vague or only tell half the story. Some are only a lot of big-sounding words that actually mean very little. Others are misleading to us customers, if not actually untrue.

Now the question right here is: What is a good informative label on a ready-made garment? To take a common, everyday example, just what would you like the tag on a cotton house-dress to tell you before you made your purchase? Well, wouldn't it be a boon to you if that little label would say whether the dress would shrink, and if so, how much? And wouldn't you like to know how fast the dye was? Then, wouldn't you find it helpful to know how well the material would wear? And any special little feature of material or design or construction that would make the dress especially useful to you?

Next time you buy a cotton wash dress for yourself or a cotton outfit for one of the children, have a look at the tag on it, if there is one. See what that tag really tells you about color fastness and shrinkage and durability and any special feature.

Miss Scott showed me a number of such tags -- some helpful, some quite the contrary. I looked first to see what they told about the color. One good definite tag I noticed announced in no uncertain terms that the garment was "Fast to washing and fast to sun." With a guarantee like that from the manufacturer, you wouldn't have to worry about fading or running color. You would know what to expect when you made your purchase. A label marked "Vat Dye" also means that the color is fast to light and water, but this expression is more familiar to the trade than to most of us women shoppers. A few labels have the backing of reliable scientific color tests. But then, a large number of other tags are very confusing on this matter of dye. For example, I saw several marked "Washable" or "Guaranteed to wash." Well, such half-way statements are very likely to fool you.

Let me tell you one experience of a friend of mine who was misled by just such a label. She bought a little blue cotton school frock for her young daughter. And she felt quite safe about buying it because it had a big tag on it marked "Washable." Well, imagine her disappointment when the dress not only shrank badly on first laundering but also lost most of its color. She bundled that ruined dress up, tag and all, and went right back to show it to the clerk she purchased it from. But the clerk offered no remedy at all. She explained, "Oh, that tag just means that you can wash the dress if you want to. It doesn't mean that the dye won't run or that the material won't shrink."

Many of the tags from cotton garments that I saw mentioned shrinkage. And they also fell in classes of good, bad and indifferent. I found one that said "Completely shrunk," and another that said "Fully shrunk," and a third marked "Will not shrink." These were all good definite labels to my mind. But I understand that some textile authorities don't favor these statements because it is hard to make them always truthful. They say that complete shrinkage at the factory of some material, especially heavy material, is very difficult. So these authorities think a better and more exact label would state the matter in per cents, might say "Will not shrink more than one percent." That at least lets you know definitely that the shrinkage will be very small. I decided that I would watch every garment I bought marked "Completely shrunk" and if the garment did shrink enough to cause me trouble, I would return it.

Well, along with definite labels I saw others that mentioned the matter of shrinkage too vaguely to be of much help. One said "Supershrunk," and another "Preshrunk," which could only mean that the garment had had some shrinking but left doubt as to how much more would take place after a few washings at home. Another tag had the statement: "Will not shrink out of fit," but that isn't definite enough either. You and the manufacturer might have a difference of opinion as to what "Fit" was.

Well, you see why it pays to be tag-wise these days. These are just a few examples of what tags can tell us about the clothes we buy, and also of what they often don't tell.

You know, in recent years women's clubs all over the country have been studying labels on canned goods to learn which kind tells them helpful facts about the food they buy. Now here's a new kind of label that any group of housewives might do well to study. Why not collect clothing tags in your club this year? Collect them and bring them to meetings to talk over and compare. A group of you can decide which type of tag is most helpful to you. Then you can tell your stores about it. Both stores and manufacturers are interested in what you as customers want. This is one way of helping the good work toward helpful labels.

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